

Muslim Debates on Women Leadership in Political Space:
Gender Perspective

Umi Sumbulah ¹

Sharia Faculty of UIN Malang 65144, East Java, Indonesia

Abstract

This paper discusses the debate on women's leadership in Islam based on Qur'an 4: 34 and hadith Bukhari from Abu Bakrah path. There are two difficulties in this issue: first, the Qur'an often refers to the normative and contextual understanding. Normatively, the Qur'an seems favoring equality of men and women, but contextually it declares an excess of men over women; second, the ontological reality shows the subjectivity of interpretation of the commentators on religious texts, both the Qur'an and Hadith. Historically, there are two aspects that must be studied to understand the hadith, ie: 1) the historical aspect of the hadith narrated by Abu Bakrah. The history of the negative side of Abu Bakrah is not readable by the critics of hadith. In this case, hadith is implicated in the construct of the thought of *salaf* scholars which requires the man to be a leader and prohibits women to be leader; 2) aspects of the historicity of hadith when it was uttered by the Prophet Muhammad, which has a key position in the understanding of hadith. The hadith has two possibilities: a) this hadith is (may) the prayer that King Kisra was not successful and victorious; b) perhaps the personal opinion of the Prophet based on the historical reality of the time that does not allow a woman to be the country's leaders, because it has no legitimacy from the public and has no authority. Through historical-sociological study, the gender activists also argue that there is no prohibition for women to become leaders in public sphere, as long as they have the ability.

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1.1. Introduction

Islam is a religion that upholds humanity. Islam's mission is to liberate human beings, both men and women, from oppression and injustice, as in many texts of the Qur'an and the hadith of the Prophet. However, often the commentators understand it partially and, to some extent, they use gender bias to favor a particular gender and subordinate others. They understand religious texts partially, so that the distortion of religious interpretation suggests discrimination against women. Women actually have the same rights as men to take part in the political spare, to enjoy the same opportunity to vote and to be elected in political positions. In a patriarchal society, leadership is always synonymous with men. Women are not entitled to neither occupy in political office nor even become president. However, leadership success is not dependent on gender, but it is determined by moral integrity,

¹ Corresponding author. Tel.: +628123399922; fax: +62341559399

E-mail address: ummisumbulah@gmail.com

managerial capability and well organization on the resources, partiality towards subordinates, as well as quality relations with all circles. Nevertheless, there are Muslim thinkers who understand that political leadership is an absolute right of men (Muhibbin, 2006). In this context, justice and gender equality can be seen in the access and participation for women to take part in the political domain as men.

1.2. Debate on Women Leadership in Qur'anic Perspective

The debate about women's leadership in the public sector comes in a number of texts in the Qur'an and the hadith of the Prophet. Various parties constructed by patriarchal culture, often challenge the implementation of women's rights. Normatively, Islam guarantees the rights of women, namely: reproductive rights; education; economy; culture; social; and political rights. However, those rights, at social level, are often manipulated by the legitimacy of religious texts, which is actually an interpretation of the commentators who covered certain circumstances. It begins with the text of the Qur'an 33: 33, which states that women should stay at home. The text understood that women should stay at home; do not leave the house except for an emergency circumstances and reasons; and they do not possess right to work outside the home. In fact, the real meaning is women should be in the household environment, not other people's households as well as the behavior of the women who went to the ignorance of the neighbor's house for backbiting, showrooms, and other bad behavior. The role of women in public life should be inspired by the Prophet's wives and female companions. We may take examples of Prophets' wife, Khadija as a successful business woman and Aisha as a scientist as well as leader of the war. Following the path of Umm Salama, Shafiya, Umm al-Sinam Aslamiya, and Laila Ghifariya as leaders involved in war; Qilat Umm Bani Ammar and Zainab bint Jahsh that both are business women; or al-Shifa, a friend of women who are good at writing and served as administrative officer at market of Medina City (Shihab, 1998).

The Qur'an 33:33 understanding is strengthened by Qur'an 4:34. The interpretation of Suyuti reinforced Shawi's interpretation about this verses, which states that the advantages given by God to man to woman are: **first**, the testimony, jihad, and attending Friday prayers; **second**, prophets and leaders are male; **third**, the permissibility of men to marry four women in the world and may be more than that in the Hereafter; **fourth**, male power to determine divorce and *ruju'*. According to al-Shawi, this provision is a general nature and cannot be annulled by a number of women who have more privileges to men, such as Maryam bint Imran, Fatima Zahra, Khadija, and Aisha (al-Shawi, 2004). Therefore, the interpretation of Qur'an 4:34 supposed to be associated with Qur'an, 9:71, which reiterated the importance of cooperation of men and women in various fields of life.

Interpretation of the Qur'an 4: 34 about the position and leadership of men over women is a problem that is often used as an example by Muslim feminists to show that the traditional interpretation discriminates against women. Gender bias in the form of placement of men over women also marks how the interpreters are always trying to put the men in a superior position. Therefore, the Muslim feminists agreed the importance of understanding this verse through a contextual approach, by examining the context in which the cause of the decline in the verse (*asbabul al-nuzul*). The Indonesian mufasssirs, such as Hassan (1988) and Hamka (1987), through their understanding

of the word *qawwam*, use this verse as the legality of normative leadership of men over women, both in the domestic and the public sphere. Hassan and Hamka interpret the word "*qawwam*" with the meaning "caretaker". Thus, women should be taken care of by men, who according to the perspective of gender activists, argues that the more degrading to women. Thus, both these commentators expressly reject the leadership of women over men.

Khaled Abou el Fadl (2003) explained the leadership of men over women through an imaginary dialogue between two interpreter communities, which he called A and B group. Group A stated that the leadership of men over women is the proof that God positioned men and women differently. Group B rejected the notion by stating that if God not repositions men and women equally, it means that God is not fair. In this context, there is assumption of a different faith. Group A subsequently stated that the leadership of men over women is not only applicable in the domestic realm but but also the public domain, because women have many weaknesses. Group B rejects the understanding of group A that the issue of leadership of household will drag to other issues. The reason is there are two conditions for the leadership of men over women in the household, namely: **first**, the extent of these men has its advantages and is able to provide a living for his family. If it does not meet these two conditions then he is not entitled to be a leader. **Second**, the verse reflects the context of the decline, which women do not access the public spare that do not have the skills as men. Therefore, when the context is different, the leadership may for not only men, but also it may change to women. In this second case, according to Abou el Fadl, there is no difference in value assumptions. The interpretation of the verse is identically as same as conditions interpreted by Abou el Fadl in the Qur'an 2: 283, which the value of women's testimony is half of the value number of the testimony of men. Therefore, the most important is how an interpreter not to be authoritarian but to be authoritative, which appreciate the difference between an interpreters understanding with other interpreters because of differences either in faith assumption, or assuming the value and methodological assumptions. In order to avoid the authoritarian nature (authoritarianism), then an interpreter must uphold honesty, restraint, comprehensive, rational and diligent.

Qur'an 49: 13 stated that the value of men and women is only determined by the quality of piety towards God. At first glance, this issue has been completed and there are no problems for men and women, because according to Umar (2001), both are bound by the fundamental principles of equality. Both men and women are equally positioned as a servant of God who is obliged to worship Him. Both also become the caliph in the earth as they have received the primordial covenant that had the potential to win races in all aspects of life. However, for Engineer (1992) it is not easy to answer questions about the status of women given by the Qur'an. To Engineer, the difficulties are caused by: **first**, the Qur'an frequently refers to the normative and contextual understanding. In the normative level, the Qur'an appears to provide equality of men and women, but at the level of contextual cites an excess of men over women. **Second**, the ontological reality show on the subjectivity of the interpreters in interpreting the verses of the Qur'an. Character subjectivity and openness of the verses of the Qur'an provides an opportunity interpretation is strongly influenced *mufasssirs* assumptions. If *mufasssirs* assume that men are more powerful than women in terms of ontological, intellectual, spiritual, men are leaders and they have significant role in society while women are not, then certainly the *mufasssirs* will interpret Qur'an in accordance with these assumptions

(Wadud, 1999).

In the context of addressing the above problems, Engineer (1993) offers interpretations based on three approaches: **first**, a historical approach to the assumption that religion is always associated with its original situation that are so complex; **second**, sociological and anthropological approach that is built on the assumption that the verses of the Qur'an are not revealed in a vacuum, so that according to the errors of the commentators due to the neglect of socio-anthropological context of a verse. This approach simultaneously insisted that the verses revealed in response to the social conditions of the time which are not automatically applicable in space and time that is different from the initial condition of the revelation of these verses. **Third**, the philosophical approach as the support of the building of liberation theology. For Engineer, Qur'an wants one's faith must be implemented to defend those who are oppressed.

The third approach from Engineer can be applied in viewing the problem of the relationship between men and women often experience inequality. One of them is due to the provision of a predication that men have certain advantages over women. This has an impact on the dominance of male leadership in the domestic realm that is extended into the public domain. Even this proposition justifies the prohibition of women as judges or political leaders based on the understanding that they are under the authority of the husband, not a free person who is able to deliver justice impartially if it is placed in a position of authority (Mir-Hosseini et.al., 2013). This, according to the books of classical interpretation, because the man is considered to have given the advantages, both giving (*wahbiyah*) and cultivated (*kasbiyah*) (al-Shawi, 2004).

The idea that men are *qawwamun*, protector and provider, as the Qur'an 4: 34, rated by Mir-Hosseini (2013) as locking axle of the patriarchal model of the family in the classical *fiqh* and become a "stumbling block" for the realization of gender equality in the present. Domination that has lasted throughout the ages except in matriarchal societies are very few. In this case, Engineer (1992) commented that historically there has been a predominance of men in all societies at all times except in matriarchal societies. Women are considered inferior to men. From this comes the doctrine of inequality between men and women lacquer. Women are not suitable for holding power or have the capabilities of men and therefore is not considered equal to men. Men should have and dominate women and deciding on its future by acting as a father, brother or husband. For that reason, he must submit to sex is superior, confined to the private sphere, and considered not to have the capacity to take decisions in the public sphere.

Patriarchal culture has put men to have the responsibility to defend and to earn the needs of all family members, while the female tasks related to reproduction and working in the domestic sector. According to Engineer (1999), the dominance of men over women in the age of ignorance has the support of the geographical conditions of the Arabian Peninsula of which in general is barren deserts, arid and surrounded by mountains. These conditions resulted in the seizure of water sources and cattle land, which sparked a war between tribes (Sumbulah, 2008). In such conditions, women did not get any rights, enslaved and treated like merchandise, and can be inherited from one party to another. Therefore, the question of leadership and other issues that seemed degrading to women cannot be

considered as a basic idea of the Qur'an because Qur'an uses keywords *ma'ruf* containing two dimensions, namely the social and moral dimensions of the two sexes should complement each other (Engineer, 1999). It implies that the relationship between men and women, must be positioned equally in a general sense, to be accepted their dignity in equal measure, and to be recognized their equal rights in the areas of social, economic and politics. For example, men and women are equal in holding marriage contract or divorce, to own or to regulate their property without the intervention of other parties, as well as equality in terms of responsibility and freedom (Engineer, 1992).

Based on the methodological construction, Engineer (1992) agrees with Riffat Hasan's interpretation on the rules of leadership. Another most important term in the Qur'an 4:34 is the word *qawwamun*. This word is the plural form of a word that is translated as king, lord, governor, or manager. Apparently, the word *qawwamun* does not necessarily mean ruler. Many sources can be used as a foothold to interpret it as an economic provider. If we mean by "provider", then the interpretation of the entire paragraph will change because of this verse talks about the division of functions, namely when women have primary responsibility as custodians of their children they should not bear liability as breadwinners and therefore men should be search living during that time span.

This concept is different from the views of the majority of the classical interpreters who make the term *qawwamun* as an excuse for husbands to control and to commit violence against wife. This occurs because the causes down verses of the Qur'an (*asbab al-nuzul*) talking about violence against the wife of a husband who had committed as insubordination (*nushuz*), then the woman with his father came to the Prophet Muhammad to denounce problems. The Prophet allowed the woman to avenge her husband's actions before Gabriel delivered the verse (al-Shawi, 2004).

1.3 Debate on Women Leadership in Hadith Perspective

In addition to the text of Qur'an, the debate about the ban on women becoming political leaders are also based on the following hadith (Bukhari, 1994):

عن أبي بكره قال لقد نفعني الله بكلمة سمعتها من رسول الله صلى الله عليه وسلم أيام الجمل بعد ماكدت آن الحق بأصحاب الجمل فأقاتل معهم قال لما بلغ رسول الله صلى الله عليه وسلم ثم آن اهل فارس قد ملكوا عليهم بنت كسرى قال لن يفلح قوم ولو امرهم امرأة (رواه البخارى)

"From Abu Bakrah said: "God gave the benefit to me in the days of war Jamal , with one sentence that I heard from the Prophet once I almost joined forces to fight alongside their camels". Abu Bakrah said: " When it came to the Prophet SAW the news , that the population of Persia has been crowned as the king's daughter of Kisra, then Prophet said: "There will be a prosperous nation that handed over the affairs (government) to women" (hadith narrated by Bukhari)

All the critics considered that the hadith narrated by Abi Bakrah is authentic, because it is one of the best companions of the Prophet. This is evidenced by their comments with the phrase *tsiqah*, *la ba'sa* and *shalih al-hadith*, titles are valuable in the context of personal qualities (*'adil*) and intellectual capacity (*dhabit*) of narrators. As well as Usman bin Haisam assessed *tsiqah*, being Auf by Ahmad ibn Hanbal assessed *tsiqah*, the *tsiqah tsabat*

according to Nasa'i and *kathir ul-hadith* according to Ibn Saad. The Aswad bin Amir rated *saduq shalih la ba'sa bihi, shalih al-hadith*. While Himad bin Salmah by Nasa'i also assessed *thiqah*. Similarly, Hamid Hasan and Abu Bakrah have the quality of reliability, *thiqah* (al-Mazzi, 1994, al-'Asqalani 1327 H).

The chain sanad on the two paths are concatenated (*ittishal*). Sanad interconnectedness can be seen from the word *haddasana*, '*an*', and the possibility of convergence of narrators (*liqa'*) which can be traced from the past life and the place of domicile of the narrators of hadith. Thus, we can conclude that the hadith about the ban on women becoming leaders has valid sanad or at least has concatenated transmitters. In testing the authenticity of this hadith, we need to pay attention to the aspects of the history of the emergence of hadith (*asbab al-wurud*). There are two aspects of history that must be studied to understand the hadith, so the understanding will be a complete and comprehensive understanding, namely: the historical aspects of these hadith are raised by Abu Bakrah and historical aspects of these hadith when it was uttered by the Prophet (Fudhaili, 2012).

In addition, the history of negative side of Abu Bakrah is not considered by the critics of hadith that has implications for the construction of scholars' thought as the absolute requirement to be a leader. Nevertheless, It is visible in the view of Imam Ghazali, Ibn Hazm, Ibn Abi Sharif Kamal, and Kamal ibn Abi Hammam (Musa, 1991; Ali, 2008). The validity and quality test of the hadith is not enough to rely solely on sanad interconnectedness but also on the intellectual capacity and moral integrity of narrators. For instance, Abu Bakrah, although he is rated as "good" by the experts of hadith, there are still other facts that should be considered, namely: **first**, a history which states that Abu Bakrah had been sentenced by flogging at the time of Caliph Umar, because he provided false testimony against accusations of adultery to Mughirah bin Shu'bah (Ibn al-Asir, 1990).

According to Abou el Fadl (2003), Abu Bakrah's historical life is quite surprising, because he once accused of being spreaders of slander that Caliph Umar rejected his testimony in legal cases. He accused Mughirah bin Shu'bah, a governor of Basra to often visit a married woman, namely Umm Jamil bint Amir. Abu Bakrah and two brothers witnessed that the Mughirah and Umm Jamil were in undressed condition and were having sexual activity. After the incident, Abu Bakrah always refused to join the prayer in congregation, led by Mughirah. The news was heard by the Caliph Umar until he held and presided at the trial. At the trial, Abu Bakrah and two brothers proposed a testimony, but they did not directly witness the meeting of the two genitals of Mughirah and Umm Jamil. This testimony considered invalid and did not meet the standards of proof required in cases of adultery. Finally, Abu Bakrah and two brothers were sentenced. After that, two brothers of Abu Bakrah, Ziyad and Nafi', repented and withdrew a charge, while Abu Bakrah remained firm with his allegations that testimony in legal matters is not accepted anymore after this incident.

Secondly, Abu Bakrah is, to some extent, "different or inconsistent" with the hadith narrated. He once told a Hadith that the Prophet cursed anyone who breaks out fraternity (*silaturrahim*). But he himself breaks out the *silaturrahim* against brother and son. His brother, Ziyad who repents and withdraws the charges against Mughirah bin Shu'bah cases related to allegations of adultery. Abu Bakrah refused to speak until his death. Abu Bakrah also refuses to engage with their children because they have political office given by Muawiyah. Third, Abu Bakrah is a

person who hates women. This is illustrated in a history which states that: "one day Abu Bakrah asked about the worst pain of his life, he replied: "father lost, lost of children and relatives, while the woman's death did not affect at all but it is the momentary pain". According to Abou El Fadl (2003), this information is sufficient to raise the question of the quality of Abu Bakrah as transmitter of hadith. While his Position as the companions of the Prophet which converts last generation is considered to become mensurate with his influence in Islamic tradition. He always played the role of forming a conservative legitimacy on the group that maintains the traditional role, and he refused to involve in politics. Mernissi (1995, 2011) also considered that Abu Bakrah is a person who had a negative reputation since the Prophet died. Abu Bakrah is not credible because he gave false testimony in the case of adultery at the time of Umar ibn Khattab. Doubts of Mernissi (2011) also addressed to Abu Hurairah's narration that also has been regarded as misogynistic hadith, such as the hadith about the three things that bring bad luck: house, woman and horse (Bukhari, 1994). Therefore, although the hadith about the ban on women's leadership is considered authentic, but it is a spontaneous response of the Prophet against the King Kisra who left the leadership to his daughter who did not have the capacity and capability.

In addition, to have doubts on the authority of Abu Bakrah and history-social setting of hadith, the other issues in this hadith is also located on the keywords of the content of the hadith, the words *لن يفلح*. The word "*lan*" has a function that negates the possibility that will happen, the word "*yufliha*" which means successful, and the word "*wallaw*" which means authorize or entrust (Munawwir, 1997). In this sentence, there is no prohibition phrase (forbidden statement), but it just limit to "forecast" will be something that has not been the case because it is an assumption, though it has been conveyed by the Prophet. The statement may contain another meaning if it is perceived by socio-historical approach.

Through a socio-historical approach, Ali (2008) concluded that the hadith of female leadership has two possibilities: **first**, it could be the prayer that the leadership of the King Kisra was not successful and victorious; **second**, perhaps this hadith is personal opinion of the Prophet based on historical reality at that point, which does not allow women to become head of state, because they do not have the authority and legitimacy of the people. Understanding these traditions, we need to examine the surrounding circumstances, background and social setting when the prophet uttered the hadith.

Historically, during the initial propagation of Islam, the Prophet had sent a letter to the authorized person of the kingdom to convert to Islam, including the King Kisra, Persian. But King Kisra refused, insulted Islam and tore up the letter of the Prophet. After sometimes, the kingdom of Kisra was murder that eventually the daughter was appointed to be his successor, Buwaran bint Syairawih ibn Kisra, as the Queen of Persia in the year 9H. From that social settings and in the Persian tradition, men should hold the post of the king, because women were considered not to have the ability. How could the country be successfull if a person who did not have the legitimacy of the community and did not quality (as a leader) led the country? Thus, the Prophet's sayings reveal the nature of social reality facing the people (*bayan al-waqi'*). That means the hadith is not related to the discourse of head of state law requirements that require men as a leader, but only information about the personal opinion of the Prophet. So

imposing hadith that shaped the news that is informative (*ikhbar*) into the problem of law, which prohibits women from being leaders, is disproportionate. This hadith should also be associated with the text of the hadith that has the same theme, such as allowing women to leave the house to go to the mosque and for other purposes.² Accordingly, there is no provision of the absolute ban on women to be leaders in the political sphere. In other words, none of the provisions can be used as a religious legitimacy to the prohibition of women's involvement, either in the public domain or become a political leader.

1.4. Conclusion

Women's leadership in politics has always been a heated debate among Muslim thinkers. There are people who agreed, but also many who disagree, especially those who use gender analysis as a perspective. Based on interpretations of the Qur'an 33:33 reinforced with Qur'an 4:34, the group that prohibits female leadership in the public space understood as the nature of God uncontested. While those that allow women to take part in the political sector understand that the verse must be in contextual, according to the situation and condition of women during the verses of the Qur'an revelation (*asbab al-nuzul*). Abu Bakrah as the first narrator of hadith, which prohibits women from being leader, has been heavily criticized. Abu Bakrah assessed as a figure of controversy, because of his personal misogynist and his inconsistency. In historical studies, this tradition is a response to the Prophet on the appointment of the daughter of King Kisra as a Persian leader. This hadith also does not discuss the terms male head of state, but only an opinion and information on the prayer of the Prophet that the Persian leader was not a success for insulting Islam. In addition, this hadith also understood at that time as women did not have access to public space, therefore it will be impossible for them to be a political leader. Thus, women have the same rights as men to take part in the political sphere.

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² See the hadith of the Prophet about his habit of morning prayers along the companions of women as follows:

أخبرنا مالك بن أنس ، عن يحيى بن سعيد ، عن عمرة بنت عبد الرحمن ، عن عائشة رضي الله عنها قالت : إن كان رسول الله صلى الله عليه وسلم ليصلي الصبح فينصرف النساء متلفعات بمروطهن ، ما يعرفن من الغلس (الشافعي)

"Hadith of Aisha, she said: they, the women of faith, praying dawn along Prophet, finished the prayer they went home, wrap them in a cloth they wear. No one can recognize them because the weather was still dark" (hadith narrated by al-Syafi'i). Muhammad ibn Idris al-Imam al-Syafi'i. al-Risalah. Dar al-Fikr, Beirut. p. 282-283.

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